

Indiana House of Representatives

News and Information

Media Office

Democratic Caucus

John Schorg, Director

Statehouse, Room 157

Indianapolis, Indiana 46204

1-800-382-9842 or 1-317-232-9621

Fax Number: 1-317-232-9792

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

February 3, 2006

STATEHOUSE REPORT FROM REP. TRENT VAN HAAFTEN

INDIANAPOLIS – It is Thursday night and we are on a break from considering bills. With the manner in which the past two weeks have occurred, it feels as if we have not left the Statehouse for the past two weeks. Tonight is the last day for bills to be passed out of the House. If a bill is not passed by midnight (it is 8:45 p.m. as I write this), the bill will die. Tonight was the first night we took a dinner break to leave the Statehouse instead of ordering food in. All in all, it has been a draining, but rewarding experience.

The past two weeks have seen us debating and voting on more than 100 measures in floor sessions that often have lasted until midnight. Before we move to the next part of the legislative process, I want to look at some of the highlights of the first month of the session.

Everything begins with Major Moves, the governor's plan to lease and turn control of the Indiana Toll Road to private foreign investors for \$3.85 billion to generate the revenue needed to pay for major road and bridge projects. This proposal, contained in House Bill 1008, was approved on a party-line vote.

I agree with the effort to improve Indiana's roads, including the building of I-69, but I voted against Major Moves for several reasons. The first concern is the change in philosophy which occurs when government turns its services over to the private sector. Our roads belong to all of us and it is the responsibility and duty of government to provide and control this infrastructure.

My second concern is the length of the lease and the immediate spending of the proceeds of the lease. If we are going to tie up the Toll Road for such a long period of time, then we should not spend all of the lease money at once. These funds should be reserved over a period of time in order to provide flexibility in our road needs.

I would have preferred that we use a proposal that would bond toll increases already proposed by the governor and use future federal revenues to issue Garvee Bonds. This plan would sell bonds for a term of 20 years and generate around \$2 billion for road projects, without losing control of the toll road.

The successful bid and proposed lease agreement for the Toll Road was only made available to us ten days prior to the floor debate on the bill. Since there were so many unanswered questions to House Bill 1008 and the lease agreement I, along with others, expressed concern for the quick pace this deal was being forced upon us. Due to this concern, Rep. David Crooks and I met with Governor Daniels to offer a proposal to delay the vote on Major Moves for 60 days in order for public hearings to be held across the state on Major Moves.

This idea was not new. When the legislature passed approval for the construction of the new Colts stadium last year, the measure required Governor Daniels to hold public meetings in the counties surrounding Indianapolis to address funding of the stadium. If this opportunity to be heard is good enough for central Indiana, then it should be good enough for the people of Posey County and Vanderburgh County.

Unfortunately, our idea for Hoosiers to be heard was dismissed and this measure was pushed through the House and is now on its way to the Senate for consideration.

Property tax relief was identified as this session's major priority by all House members. House Bill 1001 offers nearly

\$150 million in property tax breaks, but identifies no way to pay for them. The bill provides one-time tax credits for homeowners this year, and there would be caps on rate increases for residential property, although those caps would not include levies for debt services and schools.

The relief contained in HB 1001 will do little to offset the double-digit property tax increases that home and business owners will see from the 2005-06 biennial state budget approved by last year's Legislature, a budget I voted against. I wish we had spent more time on property tax relief last year, because it would have helped property owners this year.

The move to restrict eminent domain gained popularity after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled governments can use the process to take private property for private economic development projects. HB 1010 would allow eminent domain to be used only as a last resort, but the bill exempts the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT), which means the state could use this provision to grab property for some of the public-private partnerships proposed by the governor.

In education, I opposed a measure to move the ISTEP skills test from the fall of the school year to the spring (HB 1240). Many of us can understand the merits of moving the test, but Superintendent of Public Instruction Suellen Reed says the move to the spring would cost taxpayers \$45 million. This is too high a price for a change at this time.

Other bills passed out of the House this session would establish human and sexual trafficking as a crime in Indiana (HB 1414), require lifetime parole for any person convicted of child molestation once that offender has completed his or her prison term (HB 1155), and deregulate the state's telecommunications industry (HB 1279), a move supporters claim will lower prices and provide more choices, but opponents believe will increase rates and ensure poor service.

With action on House bills complete, it is time to re-energize and begin work on legislation sent to our chamber from the Indiana Senate.

If you need to reach me during the 2006 session, you can call using the toll-free Statehouse telephone number of 1-800-382-9842, e-mail me through my Internet web site at www.IN.gov/H76 or write to me in care of the Indiana House of Representatives, 200 W. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN 46204.

---30---

This Report can be accessed on the Internet at www.IN.gov/H76